

General Plan Program City Council & Planning Commission Joint Study Session Meeting Minutes, June 24, 2003

The Riverside City Council and Planning Commission convened in a joint meeting on June 24, 2003 at 6:00 P.M. on the 7th floor of City Hall, in the Mayor's Ceremonial conference room. Attendees were as follows:

City Council Members

Chuck Beaty, Ward 1
Ameal Moore, Ward 2
Joy Defenbaugh, Ward 3
Frank Schiavone, Ward 4
Vice Mayor Ed Adkinson, Ward 5
Nancy Hart, Ward 6
Laura Pearson, Ward 7

(Mayor Loveridge was unable to attend.)

Planning Commission Members

Chairperson David Leonard
Vice Chairperson David Agnew
Bill Densmore
Christian Singleterry
Finn Comer
Hermant Kurani
Rita Norton

City Staff

Ken Gutierrez, Planning Director
Craig Aaron, Principal Planner
Diane Jenkins, AICP, Senior Planner
Patricia Brenes, Associate Planner
Herman Mukasa, AICP, Associate Planner
Wendell Bugtai, Planning Intern

Consultant Team

John Bridges, Cotton/Bridges/Associates
Laura Stetson, Cotton/Bridges/Associates
John Cook, Cotton/Bridges/Associates
Sam Gennawey, Moore Iacofano Goltsman
Esmerelda Garcia, Moore Iacofano Goltsman
Larry Morrison, The Arroyo Group

Ken Gutierrez and the consultant team kicked off the meeting with a brief summary of the general plan process to date. Following a review of the background information, the City Council and Planning Commission were asked to give the Planning staff and the consultant team policy direction on several issues. A summary of the discussion of key topics are presented below.

Measure C/Proposition R

Members of the City Council and Planning Commission said that these regulations represent the voice of the people since they were adopted by initiative. The measures appear to benefit the City and should remain in place, although the laws contain some “gray areas” that may need to be addressed separately. It was agreed that the General Plan update would not recommend any changes to these laws.

March Joint Air Reserve Base

Participants stated that land uses in the vicinity of the March JARB need to be consistent with the planning efforts of the March Joint Powers Authority.

Western Gateway Area (La Sierra)

Participants were asked if office and light industrial usage would be appropriate in the western areas of the City. There was general agreement on this point, so long as developments were consistent with established and up-and-coming neighborhoods in La Sierra. The discussion moved to the status of Home Gardens; some stated that the City may wish to investigate its eventual annexation if it could provide the City with constructive options.

One member stated that when talking about “gateways”, one should think of every off-ramp into the City as a gateway, not just areas near the City’s jurisdictional limits.

University Avenue

Participants were asked if University Avenue between Downtown and UCR would be an appropriate location for additional housing and or mixed-use developments. Participants stated that higher-quality housing targeted at students and faculty, along with some supportive commercial uses, would be appropriate land uses to help revitalize this corridor. Some members expressed concern over an excessively prescriptive definition of “mixed use” and suggested that the General Plan allow for market influence in the area. Other members noted that the General Plan should also consider opportunities for higher-density housing near Cal Baptist and La Sierra Universities.

Opportunities for Infill Housing

The consultant team stated that some areas of the City have gradually evolved into suburban and urban character; participants were asked about potential opportunities for additional infill housing in already developed areas. Some members responded that several vacant and/or aging shopping centers located along established traffic corridors and areas around Metrolink stations might be appropriate locations for such uses. Others expressed concern over the potential negative perception of intensifying certain neighborhoods so that other neighborhoods could maintain a lower-intensity character.

Southern Sphere of Influence

Members stated that the newly revised southern Sphere of Influence area was still too large and in need of drastic reduction. Discussion of applying hillside zoning standards to the area was tabled.

Urban Design

Participants generally agreed that design standards need to be raised and better enforced. Some members called into question the incorporation of water and trees as ubiquitous design elements, stating that alternative landscaping methods, such as xeriscape and increased use of native plants, need to be encouraged. Members also expressed approval for an expansion of the City's way-finding signs to areas beyond downtown.

Magnolia/Market Corridor

Participants stated that "clean" industrial and flex office/R&D uses could be appropriate for certain areas of this corridor. Several members expressed concern about the street's ability to handle future traffic levels. Members of the consultant team indicated that the Riverside Transit Authority is looking at the implementation of express buses for the corridor.

Circulation/Mobility

Most participants stated that Overlook Parkway needs to be completed, but added concern about the potential for excessive regional traffic to be deposited on otherwise local-serving streets. Others stated the need for the continuation of Collett Avenue in the western part of the City. Participants stated that Arlington and La Sierra Avenues as well as Van Buren Boulevard have the potential to serve as "great streets" and ought to be improved with potential expansions. Several stated that Madison Street was underutilized. Participants stated that grid street plans within subdivisions could be considered and that the City ought to explore the use of additional traffic-calming measures and use of bicycle lanes.

Police and Community Facilities

Participants stated that the Police Chief's plan to divide the City into precincts was worth continued exploration. Many stated that police presence in the neighborhoods ought to be as important a consideration as response time to incidents. Later, in a discussion of community facilities, participants wished to explore opportunities for more joint-use facilities in the neighborhoods as a means of better delivering various services. Some noted institutional barriers to joint-use facilities, particularly when school districts would be involved. Lobbying against these barriers was suggested.

It was noted that the Northside neighborhood was lacking a youth facility and that the City ought to explore land purchases adjacent to existing community facilities so as to ease future expansions.

Arts and Culture

Participants expressed reservations over the addition of an in-lieu fee for public art, citing concern that excessive fees may lead developers to bypass the City for other areas.

Education

Some participants stated that the City could assist in developing partnerships between schools and other City institutions.

Parks and Recreation

Participants expressed interest in expanding accessibility to the Santa Ana River, including participation in a regional effort to extend a mixed-use recreational trail along the entire river.

Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances

Participants stated that Proposition R and Measure C ought to be codified in the Zoning Ordinance; that the PRD standards need to be reviewed; and that a better pre-development review process needs to be created. There was some conflict over the need for the Design Review Board, with some members stating that increased staff authority might obviate the need for DRB review.

Participants also stated that a blanket restriction against warehousing should not be considered. The objection is to large warehouses that generate little employment and lots of traffic. The Zoning Ordinance should permit smaller, local-serving warehouse uses (with point-of-sales revenue generation potential), similar to those that have been successfully developed in Corona.

Participants stated that staff ought to have the authority to approve parcel maps (4 or fewer lots) and that street standards should be reviewed to help provide landscaped parkways with street trees at curblines, rather than sidewalks extending from curblines.

Conclusion of Meeting

Following concluding remarks, participants were thanked for their input and informed of the General Plan website, as well as of additional upcoming meetings and benchmarks in the General Plan update process.